smashing pumpkins ★ siamese dream

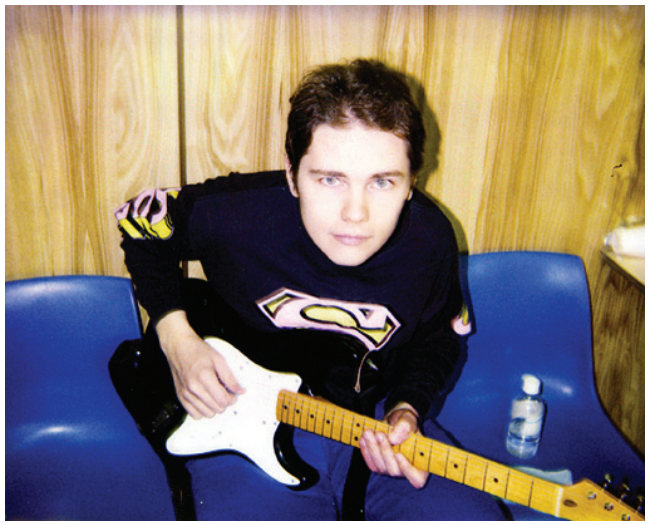
Siamese Dream was a rock dream come true — and a bit of a nightmare too.

Far from any dreaded sophomore slump, *Siamese Dream* would represent The Smashing Pumpkins' wildly successful second coming — and become an acknowledged classic album, a characteristically idiosyncratic yet strangely accessible masterpiece in the midst of a historic sea change in rock.

"We were coming from an alternative universe where if you got lucky, you became Sonic Youth and could sell out a club like the Metro," Corgan remembers. "And if you were *really* lucky, you were Echo & The Bunnymen or Depeche Mode and could play to 3000 people. That was the world we were living in and understood. Then suddenly, Nirvana's blowing up and Pearl Jam's blowing up — and don't forget we've been on tour with Red Hot Chili Peppers with Pearl Jam opening up for us. We saw what was happening and suddenly you saw this *massive* tide coming in — or going out, depending on how you look at it. I'm not a stupid guy, so I thought, I better learn how to write some pop songs *now*. You could see that the bands that survived were the ones that had actual *good* songs. My attitude was, I'm not going back to work at the record store."

Such was the intensity of that time in alternative rock that right before *Siamese Dream* was recorded, Corgan found himself summoned to a big label meeting at Virgin Records in Los Angeles. "They all gathered and gave me this big speech. They saw what was happening and wanted to do a complete re-release of *Gish* on Virgin and blow it up to another level." Recorded for the independent Caroline Records, *Gish* had become an unlikely hit. "The people at Virgin told me that this was our moment and basically offered us the keys to the kingdom. I listen to this whole spiel, and then I said, 'No.' There was a *screeching* silence. I told them, '*Gish* isn't the record you want. There are no hit songs on that album. Let me go back to the studio and make a different kind of album.' They seemed stunned I'd say no. Then I'll never forget it — the head of radio there Phil Costello, who was coming off working like four #1 Paula Abdul hits said, "The kid's *right*." After that, they all backed off, and we went on to make *Siamese Dream*."

"I immediately went into a major depression and writing block," Corgan recalls. "I was whacked out of my mind for eight months. I was whacked out of my mind by whatever we were taking — like copious amounts of LSD and mushrooms. I just thought, I can't do this." Corgan says the turning point came when he was in a bookstore and found the book *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. "That book changed my life. She suggested you do these affirmations — like write 'I Am An Artist' three times, and I couldn't do it. I'm not even joking. It was hard for me to go through the transition from thinking I'm a musician to saying I'm an artist. *That's* how messed up in the head I was. So I went through a massive suicidal depression where I came within a hair's breadth of tossing myself out of a window. The next day I sat down on my bed in the morning and wrote "Disarm" and "Today" within twenty-four hours — and that was when I knew I had something



different to say. I finally submitted to whatever was my own voice inside. If you listen to *Gish*, I wanted to be someone else like Sonic Youth, Dinosaur Jr., The Cure or Led Zeppelin, or Black Sabbath. I didn't want to be this whiny sad guy, but that's who I was. So I decided to be myself, and that's when these songs poured out of me."

Siamese Dream — which once again found The Pumpkins working with producer Butch Vig — was recorded not in Chicago, or Madison, Wisconsin where *Gish* had been cut, but rather at Triclops Sound Studios in Marietta, Georgia. As Corgan explains it today, "That was about trying to keep the band out of Chicago, and in particular it was a way to keep Jimmy away from Chicago. We felt it was important to keep Jimmy away from his bad influences at home, but of course he could find as many bad influences in Georgia. The infamous story is that Jimmy disappeared for a week in Georgia, and we went on the radio and said, 'If anyone sees our drummer, can you send him back? We need to finish our album.' True story. Back then, Jimmy had some major issues with his life, but he was *never* inebriated in the studio. None of us ever were."

This is not to say that band relations between The Pumpkins were even remotely dreamy during the *Siamese Dream* sessions. "This is where things went wrong," Corgan explains. "This is where there was maximum pressure. We *all* felt it. Butch felt it too. I became *very* intense. There was a feeling of walking in a room and thinking, if things *don't* go right here, my dream will *never* come true. You worry if you're going to be a one hit wonder. So I don't know what positive spin I can put on it for you because after a period of time I end up essentially working on the album alone with Butch. That's where my friendship with James ended because he was so furious with the way the whole thing worked out. Jimmy went off the deep end and ended up in rehab during the making of the record. And D'arcy quit the band for a time during the making of the record. It's amazing we all survived it somehow."

Corgan did share two co-writes on the album with Iha. As Corgan explains, "The way we worked back them was James

would make riff demos and play stuff for me, and those ones stuck out. I remember 'Mayonaise,' James played for me in Japan. I put on headphones, and as soon as I heard it I started singing the melody, which was weird. 'Soma' was this beautiful riff from James that was the kind of thing I would *never* have written on my own, but it was so lovely that I completely connected to it. In fact, it was such a beautiful riff that I thought I've got to build a *really* beautiful song around it. So we worked really hard on 'Soma' for around four months."

Asked what songs on *Siamese Dream* mean the most to him today, Corgan thinks for a moment then answers. "I think you have a couple things that stand out," he says. "We start the album out with 'Cherub Rock' which is basically my big F.U. to the indie world. If you read the lyrics, that was basically me railing against the hipper-than-thou NYC indie mentality. 'Today' sticks out because it's basically a really happy song about suicide — which suits me somehow. 'Disarm' stands out because it's basically about being abused as a child, and it represents something that was bottled up in me for years. Those songs stood out for a lot of people, and they stood out for me too."

Corgan is quick to add that Butch Vig deserves tremendous credit for the enduring sonic power of *Siamese Dream*. "The record I wanted to make was *completely* unruly," Corgan says today. "It was this massive sound using fuzz pedals and stuff that are *really* hard to record well. But Butch was really patient for me. He's not a guy who would ever subvert you or play head games with you. Butch supported me all the way in this crazy vision. So if you listen to *Gish* and then listen to *Siamese Dream,* that's a pretty vast sonic leap to make. Butch was really on me to sing and play my best. He drove us crazy with all the takes, and made Jimmy do like nine hundred takes. Basically, he really insisted that we step up and make an A–level record. Put it this way: Butch was the *only* person who could have made that record with us because we respected him so much to live up to his high standards."

Revisiting *Siamese Dream* again for this expanded reissue nearly two decades later has only made Corgan appreciate it more. "This is probably the only record I'll ever make that is that perfect in its intention," he says. "I was just listening to the remastered version and it sounds beautiful. I was thinking about it today and now it's like I have at least one thing in my life that is that *shiny*. I'm by nature a deconstructionist. As a rule, messy records make more sense to me than this shiny Cadillac of an album. But I'm really happy because it's not like I'm sitting here at 44 thinking, I should have done "the" one. At the time, I was happy *Siamese Dream* was successful, but I worried it was too rigid because the band was very ferocious. I felt like we neutered the ferocity in search of perfection. But now *Siamese Dream* makes total sense to me. You

listen to *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness* and that's more The Pumpkins as we were, which was very dark. But now in retrospect, I love both because one's the *ideal* of the band, and the other is the reality of the band."

David Wild
September 2011

Siamese Dream Track By Track

Cherub Rock: The opening figure is a sneaky twist on a Rush riff that lights us up. We have lift-off to the planet Now-or-Never. The song's message is aimed squarely at the empty hearts of our detractors, who question our doleful mix of cheeky sincerity and our lack of reverence for false indie gods and oh-so-carefully posed pedestals. Shame that little has changed since then, amen brothers and sisters! The solo is uncorked down from the gentle glades of Itchycoo Park, where on a rainy day you can't tell which way your mind is melting and into what sewer it may be carelessly thrown. There is no getting out of here, but you can still ask any stranger politely to take your leave. We are now on our way to the bottommost of the alternamess.

Quiet: I'll admit I was always uncomfortable with this song at the number 2 position, seeing as there are stronger songs left in the gaggle. But it still has a nice adrena-lean to it, an icy sheen that gets over because it does ask for excessive quiet while giving none at all. "Silent metal mercies / castrate boys to the bone" has always made me wince a little in familiar refrain. Trust the song, not the singer. A car chase starts, winter ends.

Today: The song that changed my life more than any other. The ultimate in irony: a chirpy song about my near-suicide that all the kids can sing along to. Probably would not have been a hit if I had offed myself in the gloaming before its release, but one can still ponder past the graveyard. I stood in our dingy rehearsal space, amps a-buzzin', and said, "This song needs an opening bit." I placed my hands on the guitar, stared down waiting, and without warning out came this chiming clock of anticipation. I wasn't sure why I needed to sing 'I want to turn you on,' but in hindsight it makes perfect sense locked in the dust of a new millennium. We are born, a generation dies soon enough.

Hummer: The first time we played this song at rehearsal, I got a skull crushing headache from playing the opening figure for thirty minutes straight. But we couldn't stop; that same entranced, menacing eastern yadda-yadda over and again; a hum de plume in honor of major keyed faith; all those Catholic dreams that one has inverted growing up in those bleak post-industrial burbs. It's a beautiful song, that in its totality lends a message that is hard to convey, but bigger than its original intention. To be yourself, you must live your life. To live your life, you must be free.

Rocket: The first song written for *Siamese Dream*, and for a time, the only good new song we had, which we played on the *Gish* tours. I had never bothered to take the time to write any formal lyrics, so I would just fake my way though them at each show. No one could hear what I was singing anyway, but the title was enough. The arrangement still sounds fresh so many years along, and watch as it all ends with a beautiful, cascading up; the boom-boom of our ship taking off. It stands as a poem to the past that has just left us behind. We are going places fast! And we can't get there fast enough. Don't forget to bring your fresh nails for the crosses hidden up on the dark side of the moon.

Disarm: A song once banned by the BBC for the use of the lyric 'cut that little child.' No one wanted to hear that it was all a stoic euphemism for the deepest cuts within. I was offered a hurry-up chance to re-record the line with a replacement that would pass the censors. The song could become a hit! I flatly refused; I wasn't going to honor the dead by dishonoring my own death. I knew the troubles this song would cause in my family. The ripple of the message got through. The string arrangement was invented on the spot, line by line. Beautifully played and stated, and understated by the men involved. There are moments where it works precisely because you trust it will, and when it does work so effortlessly you wonder again why they all can't have such lucky stars.

Soma: From the Aldous Huxley book *Brave New World*, it is the narcotic we need to get by all that we cannot stomach to see in others. Or ourselves. A lover betrays his other. He slips into the night. He asks her to sleep while he is awakened by the looming city just beyond. He is alone no matter who he takes in his bed. Love is a fraud. But solitude is a friend you can rely on. Robot eagles fly up to the spotlights, to circle and hover above when the lost live. The sun comes up slow, and the vampires scurry home to brew fresh lies.

Geek U.S.A.: The song is made absent a lyric or a melody. It is a locomotive without discernible motive. We are certain we need this song to drive side two of the record. By the time we take it into the studio, it is clocking in at over seven and one half minutes. Words are frantically typed up, Dadaist fractures like bits of glass glued onto the page. Go! Tracking day I have to cut over two minutes of the song out. Go! Gibberish. Broken people, lovers swing over chasms. Families wait for kids to break. Go!

Mayonaise: In Japan I hear the scratchy sound, I hum along. The words come easy at first, and then a blank is drawn. I can go no further. Endless drum takes, thousands are played. None satisfy. The tape is spliced so many times it begins to disintegrate. My mother appears at the refrain. What is she doing here, weeping missing years? Who are these people that populate this nothing world? Hope abounds in what had gone missing, but why?

Spaceboy: My little brother was born 'not right.' The doctors advise that he be put in a state home, to be raised without love or family. "He will be a burden upon you," a miracle we shall keep. He is an astronaut, a wandering soul. When he goes he goes out into deep space and may never come back. But he is not an innocent. He is not oblivious. He does see. He is no longer a child.

Silverfuck: An endless jam that we beat into submission, using the club crowds as test dummies for what needs to be a ever-infinite magnum opus. We are inspired by a date we play in Minneapolis by a UK band called Thee Hypnotics, who play a thirty minute encore that goes on for so long that the club cuts the power, yet the band refuses to stop. A fistfight breaks out. We stand in awe of their magical power. One can only find these hidden realms by pushing past the bounds of time and expectation. Eventually this song will stretch in 45 minutes, driving half the crowd for the exits. Managers warn that this song alone is costing us t-shirt sales. I end the song by breaking every string off with my bare hands. We are all fucked. It doesn't matter what t-shirt you are wearing when you figure that out.

Sweet Sweet: A hobo that hops the tracks and jumps on the train. He wants to go wherever the ride will take him. There is joy in a refusal to change, even when you know that the journey is fixed.

Luna: Written in a hotel room in London on a three week stay. We come early for press, and the powers that be figure it's cheaper to have us sit and wait than fly us home, only to return. I am in love with someone that doesn't love me. My songs are better than hers. This is my way to prove a point not worth making. I lean my back up against the wall of my room, pushing my spine up straight. My guitar has been painted day-glo at the hands of a sweet madman. I sing a love song in an empty room. It is for the moon. It can never be for the one you love.

Billy Corgan
September 2011

Original Credits:

Original album produced by Butch Vig and Billy Corgan
Recorded at Triclops Sound Studios, Atlanta
Engineered by Mark Richardson, Jeff Tomei, and Butch Vig
Special technical engineering by Tim Holbrook
Mixed at Rumbo Recorders, Canoga Park, CA by Alan Moulder with
Butch Vig and Billy Corgan
Mix Engineers: Andy Udoff and Dick Kaneshiro
Remastered by Bob Ludwig at Gateway Mastering, Portland, Maine, 2011

Original *Siamese Dream* art direction: Len Peltier
Original *Siamese Dream* design: Steve J. Gerdes
Original A&R: Mark Williams
Mike Mills appears courtesy of Warner Bros. Records Inc.

Reissue Credits:

Reissue produced by Billy Corgan and Kerry Brown
Reissue co-produced by Dennis Wolfe, Michael Murphy and David K. Tedds
Reissue art direction / design: Noel Waggener
Inner photos courtesy of Billy Corgan & Jimmy Chamberlin
Photography: Melodie McDaniel
Legal: Jill Berliner

The Smashing Pumpkins:

Billy Corgan: vocals, guitar, mellotron
D'arcy: vocals, bass guitar
Jimmy Chamberlin: drums
James Iha: guitar
with additional help from
Eric Remschneider: cello on "Disarm" and "Luna"
David Ragsdale: violin on "Disarm" and "Luna"
Mike Mills: piano on "Soma"
String arrangements by Billy Corgan, David Ragsdale, Eric Remschneider,
and Butch Vig

All songs written by Billy Corgan (Cinderful Music, BMI), except:
"Soma", "Mayonaise" written by Billy Corgan and James Iha (Cinderful Music / Cellophane Star / Chrysalis Songs, BMI)

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